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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000907

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR AF LO

SUBJECT: SLOVAK DECISION ON AFGHANISTAN LIKELY TO COME
AFTER DECEMBER 2

REF: A. STATE 186256

1B. BRATISLAVA 904

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. GoS Ministers have told us that Slovakia is likely to delay a decision on moving its engineering unit in Afghanistan from Kabul to Kandahar until after municipal elections on December 2. Post believes this is a political decision that is not likely to be influenced by the provision of further information on the security situation or specific tasks that the unit would be asked to engage in. Post nonetheless believes it is important to keep pressure on the Slovaks in advance of the Force Generation conference and the Riga Summit, to encourage a fast and favorable decision. Contacts in MoD and MFA have expressed concern that a decision may be made at the highest political levels without benefit of the normal inter-Ministerial process. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On November 14, in response to the points in Ref A, both FM Jan Kubis and Interior Minister Robert Kalinak told the Ambassador that Slovakia is likely to delay a decision on redeploying troops from Kabul to Kandahar until after Slovak municipal elections on December 2. Kalinak said specifically that this is a political decision, and does not reflect a need for any more information or force-protection commitments from Allies. "Why would we send troops into harms way and then be blamed for any casualties. This would be a decision of our government, not the previous one." Kubis noted that we could not "overestimate" the PM's comments but not "underestimate" them as well.

¶3. (C) Jan Foltin, President Gasparovic's foreign policy advisor, told DCM that Gasparovic "holds a somewhat different view on this subject" than does Fico, and one that "would please you." (Comment. Gasparovic has generally supported the deployment of Slovak troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the MFA says he favors moving forces from Kabul to Kandahar. Gasparovic said as much when NATO SYG visited Bratislava the week of October 30. End comment.) Post is providing Ref A points to the office of the President, who will also lead the Slovak delegation to Riga. Fico's lack of presence at the summit had more to do with protocol issues with respect to the President than with an anti-NATO view by Fico, Kalinak told the Ambassador.

¶4. (C) Tomas Valasek, Acting Director General for Defense Policy and Planning at MoD, (protect) told DCM that PM Fico did not consult with the DefMin or the Ministry before making his statements over the weekend about how deployments abroad should be limited to places that were safe for Slovak soldiers. Similarly, MFA Poldir Miro Lajcak said FM Kubis

was not happy with the statement and that he would welcome a letter from us (as he received from UK Foreign Secretary Beckett) urging a positive decision on the NATO request.

¶15. (C) Monika Tomasovicova, Director of the MFA Security Policy Department told Poloffs that she had seen a draft position paper several months ago that discussed five options for the Slovak Mission in Afghanistan, but that as far as she knew that paper had not been discussed with anyone in MFA recently. Tomasovicova was clearly frustrated by the lack of communication between MoD and MFA since PM Fico's government came to office in July, and said that she would not be surprised if a preliminary decision was made by the Cabinet even before she would be consulted. (Comment. The MoD position on Iraq was not made in consultation with the MFA, but was presented to Kubis by DefMin Kasicky as a done deal. End comment.)

¶16. (U) According to a page 1 article in the November 15 issue of Pravda (left-of-center independent daily), a "senior NATO representative in Brussels" said that a Slovak Army Staff team that was sent to Kandahar to examine the security situation there is expected to agree with the relocation of Slovak forces from Kabul. The same source said that NATO is expecting a decision from the Slovaks in the first half of ¶2007. This team is due to present its findings to the MoD hierarchy on November 16 or shortly thereafter.

¶17. (C) Comment. Throughout these discussions, we heard no criticism of the British, Dutch or Canadian offers of protection, or that Slovaks need more information before arriving at a decision. The timeline seems driven by Fico's domestic political considerations rather than by a military assessment of the mission. We would like to think that the sensitivity over the local election campaign suggests that GoS plans to approve the request to move to Kandahar but does not want to publicize it so soon after the death of a soldier in Iraq. Nevertheless, we will continue to remind GoS of their obligations as per talking points in Ref A, and recommend that officers in Washington D.C., Brussels and Riga do the same. We are getting the distinct impression that the MoD is waiting for cues from Fico before making any policy recommendations. Ultimately, we may have to raise the issue directly with Fico. End comment.

VALLEE